

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USICA WASHDC
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 7330

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, US, UR, AF
SUBJECT: AFGHAN EDITOR EXPRESSES DESPAIR AT PERCEIVED SOVIET
"TAKEOVER" OF AFGHANISTAN

1. SUMMARY: DURING A RECENT VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN BY STROBE TALBOTT, WASHINGTON DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT FOR "TIME" MAGAZINE, AND "TIME" NEW DELHI BUREAU CHIEF LARRY MALKIN, THEY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE IN A FRANK AND OPEN DISCUSSION WITH GHULAM NABI DEHESTANI, ACTING EDITOR OF "ANIS" (THE LARGEST GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED DAILY NEWSPAPER). DEHESTANI'S REMARKS REFLECT A GENUINE DISAFFECTION WITH THE POLICIES OF THE CURRENT REVOLUTIONARY REGIME IN KABUL, AS WELL AS DESPAIR THAT THE UNITED STATES LACKS THE WILL TO REVERSE THE PRO-SOVIET COURSE OF EVENTS IN THIS REGION AND THE WORLD. END OF SUMMARY.

2. A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR FRANK DISCUSSION AROSE WHEN DEHESTANI
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TURNED OUT TO BE THE ONLY AFGHAN TO ACCEPT A SEPTEMBER 6 LUNCHEON INVITATION IN TALBOTT'S HONOR. ALTHOUGH DEHESTANI COUCHED MOST OF HIS COMMENTS IN CAUTIOUS AND SOMETIMES ELLIPTICAL LANGUAGE, HIS VIEWS WERE UNMISTAKABLE AND PROVIDED AN EXTRAORDINARY INSIGHT INTO THE CURRENT THINKING OF ONE RANKING AFGHAN OFFICIAL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME.

3. AT THE OUTSET, DEHESTANI EXPRESSED SYMPATHY WITH THE PROFESSED REFORMIST AIMS OF THE REVOLUTINARY REGIME, BUT HE ADDED THAT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIVE MONTHS SINCE THE APRIL 27 REVOLUTION HAVE REVEALED THAT AFGHANISAN IS CLEARLY BEING "TAKEN OVER BY ANOTHERPOWER." THE MAIN ISSUE NOW, HE ADDED, WAS HOW TO RETAIN ANY SEMBLANCE OF "TRADITIONAL AFGHAN VALUES AND INDEPENDENCE." DEHESTANI REJECTED TALBOTT'S CONTENTION THAT THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS REQUIRE MORE TIME TOSTUDY TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE REACHING CONCLUSIONS, AND ASSERTED THAT OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE ALREADY EXISTS, AND THAT THE U.S. WAS "NOT FACING UP TO ITS RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SUPERPOWER AND CHAMPION OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS."

4. DEHESTANI CLAIMED THAT THE U.S. SOMEHOW HAD AN OBLIGATION TO HELP AFGHANISTAN RETAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM THE SOVIET UNION, BUT HE WAS NOT SPECIFIC REGARDING HOW THIS OBLIGATION SHOULD BE DISCHARGED. HE BELIEVED THAT IRAN WAS THE REAL TARGET OF THE SOVIET UNION'S POLICY IN THIS REGION, AND CLAIMED THAT THERE WAS A DEFINITE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE REVOLUTION IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE RECENT UNREST IN IRAN. ACCORDING TO DEHESTANI, AMERICAN "FAILURE" TO HELP AFGHANISTAN HAD NOT BEEN LOST ON THE PAKISTANIS, AND WHEN IT BECAME ISLAMABAD'S TURN TO PRESERVE ITS INDEPENDENCE, PAKISTAN WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR ASSISTANCE.

5. TURNING TO THE ROLE OF THE FOURTH ESTATE, DEHESTANI CLAIMED
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THAT A GENUINELY FREE PRESS COULD BE A DANGEROUS THING FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, SINCE THE POPULATION IS GENERALLY UN-EDUCATED AND IGNORANT. THUS, HE CONTINUED, IN A COUNTRY LIKE AFGHANISTAN THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS HAS THE RESPONSIBLITY FOR EDUCATING THE POPULATION REGARDING ISSUES AND EVENT.

6. COMMENT: DEHESTANI IS A WELL-EDUCATED MAN WHO IS OBVIOUSLY DISTURBED OVER HOW HE SEES EVENTS UNFOLDING IN AFGHANISTAN, DESPITE HIS PROBABLY SINCERELY-HELD SYMPATHIES WITH THE STATED GOALS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME. THE POSITION HE HOLDS IS POTENTIALLY CRUCIAL, ESPECIALLY IF HE TAKES ACTION ON HIS EXPRESSED COUNTRIES IS TO "EDUCATE" THE PEOPLE.WHETHER DEHESTANI CAN GET HIS CONCERNS INTO THE PUBLIC PRESS, AND CAN REMAIN EMPLOYED (OR EVEN OUT OF JAIL) REMAINS TO BE SEEN; SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE A NEAT TRICK INDEED.

7. IN THE BIGGER PICUTURE, THE QUESTION OF HOW CLOSE AFGHAN-SOVIET TIES SHOULD BECOME REMAINS A POTENTIALLY CRITICAL ISSUE IN THIS COUNTRY'S BODY POLITIC, AND COULD EVENTUALLY LEAD TO VIOLENTLY DESTABILIZING SCHISMS WITHIN THE REGIME'S LEADERSHIP. IN THIS CONNECTION, MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS PRECISELY THE ISSUE WHICH CAUSED THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP TO ARREST GENERAL

ABDUL QADER, FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE, WHO WAS BELIEVED TO BE AN AFGHAN NATIONALIST, AS WELL AS A PROGRESSIVE LEFTIST, AND WHO WAS REPORTEDLY OPPOSED TO THIS REGIME'S WARM EMBRACE OF ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBOR. HOW MANY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE UPPER-MIDDLE LEVEL BUREAUJACY (BOTH CIVILIAN AND MILITARY) CURRENTLY SHARE DEHESTANI'S DESPAIR IS IMPOSSIBLE TO JUDGE, BUT THE REGIME COULD FACE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES IN THE FUTURE SHOULD SIMILAR BELIEFS BECOME MORE WIDESPREAD AMONG THIS COUNTRY'S VERY THIN EDUCATED CLASS.

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